

[Joe Giesler]

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FORM A Circumstances of Interview

NAME OF WORKER Edna B Pearson ADDRESS 108 E 18 So Sioux

DATE November 15, 1938 SUBJECT Interview No. 21

1. Name and address of informant Joe Giesler, 3311 Jennings St. Sioux City, Iowa
2. Date and time of interview November 15, 1938, 2 P M
3. Place of interview 3311 Jennings St. Sioux City
4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant Mrs. Talbot, 819 S. 25 St., Omaha, Nebraska.
5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you No one
6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

Mr. Giesler owns his own home at the above address; he is a widower and his son and daughter-in-law live with him and keep house for him. The house is a very nice bungalow type, beautifully kept us both inside and outside. [?] 15 neb

FORM B Personal History of Informant

NAME OF WORKER Edna B Pearson ADDRESS 108 E 18 So Sioux

DATE November 15, 1938 SUBJECT Interview No. 21

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NAME AND ADDRESS OF INFORMANT Joe Giesler, 3311 Jennings, Sioux City

1. Ancestry Mr. Giesler didn't tell me about his parents
2. Place and date of birth Peoria, Illinois, about 1860
3. Family Two or three sons, didn't mention any daughters
4. Place lived in, with dates Peoria, Illinois from birth to 1868; Elk Point, South Dakota from 1868 to about 1878, Sioux City,, Bismark, St. Louis, and Yankton, South Dakota, and back to Sioux City. Indefinite about dates.
5. Education, with dates About an Eighth Grade education but indefinite about dates.
6. Occupations and accomplishments, with dates "Steamboated" all his life
7. Special skills and interests Steamboating
8. Community and religious activities ——
9. Description of informant Mr. Giesler, is a tall, rather thin man; very pleasing in appearance and glad and willing to tell what he can; is a retired steamboat captain; is very indefinite as to dates.
10. Other points gained in interview

While he was talking with me from what he said, his daughter-in-law said that according to that he must be 78 years old, and that they had great arguments as to his age.

FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

NAME OF WORKER Edna B Pearson ADDRESS 108 E 18 So Sioux

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DATE November 15, 1938 SUBJECT Interview No. 21

NAME AND ADDRESS OF INFORMANT Joe Giesler, 3311 Jennings, Sioux City

My parents and I came here in the fall of 1868, in a covered wagon from Peoria, Illinois. We stopped all night at the old Sioux City House; next day went on up in Dakota and got to Elk Point in the evening; went to the outskirts of town and found a log house and a stable for the horses; camped there all night and all of us slept on the floor. In the morning there was two inches of snow all over us as the logs were not chinked. Father bought a place at Elk Point. I left there when I was about 18 or twenty and came down to Sioux City and the next day got a job on a steam boat; that was in November.

Captain William Luther was born and raised in Arkansas; was a Confederate soldier. He came up here and ran a ferry boat on the Missouri. I worked for him when I left Elk Point; worked for him quite a while and then they got the pontoon bridge and I left him when they built the pontoon bridge. I worked for the government three years and came back and worked for Luther and me and Dick Talbot bought him out. I went to Yankton in 1900 and operated a ferry until they put in the bridge at Yankton; have been away from Yankton for ten or twelve years; steamboated from Bismark, North Dakota on up the Missouri for five or six years, and got into the pontoon business with Mr. Talbot in 1890 or 1892, I think, or in 1893. Only ran the pontoon bridge two or three years, until they built the combination bridge. Just before the bridge was built I sold out my interest and Captain Talbot ran it six or eight months or a year, and sold the whole business out to a party at Decatur, Nebraska, and then he went to Alaska and I went to work for the government.

[You see, the bridge was built in 1895; I worked for the government about three years, running a boat; steamboated for fifty-four years. The combination bridge was built in 1895; I was on the council and after the bridge was built they had a banquet at the old Mondamin Hotel to celebrate the opening of the bridge; there were about three or four hundred at the banquet.?)

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The first railroad in Sioux City was built in 1867; the first railroad at Yankton was in 1872. There were no railroads around here before 1867 and everything had to be shipped by steam boat. Went to St. Louis; worked on a ferry boat two years; after that went to Bismark on the "[Josaphine?]" and worked for the government three years. I have seen as many as seven steam boats at one time in Sioux City, six at Fort Benton and from eight to ten at Bismark when they tied up there some times in the summer.

Once when I was steamboating a farmer wanted to send some hogs up the river to another farmer; we put them on the boat and had them all penned up; as the boat was going up the river someone pulled the whistle; this scared the hogs and they broke through their pen and jumped over the side of the boat; and swam to shore. It took us two or three days to round them all up.

One spring the ice took the pontoon bridge out. We had a team on the bridge, and a wagon. About fifteen men were working on the bridge getting it ready to take out; all the men jumped off the bridge but me. By the time I got ready to jump the bridge was out too far. I took the harnesses off the horses. As luck would have it, the bridge moved down only about a thousand feet and struck a sand bar and stopped. There was about one hundred and fifty feet of open water and the rest of the boys got a skiff and got me; the horses swam to shore. We pulled the boats in and saved most of the stuff.

Another time, in October, we got a five foot rise, unexpected; never saw such a raise at that time before. It took the bridge out and most of it went down the river about fourteen miles. I lost \$5,000 or \$6,000 in that deal, with the boats and the time I lost. I finally got everything all together and when the ice broke up I ran the ferry a while and then [?] they put in the pontoon bridge. That was the last time; next year they built the combination bridge.

I left Bismark the 9th of November on the steamer "Tompkins"; there was slush ice in at the time we left; further down it was colder and more ice; got down below LaBoe, North

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Dakota, and the ice got so thick we had to stop; laid there that winter. In the spring I went to work, got the boat cut out and all the lines out and a couple days before the ice broke up the captain came out with a crew of men. It was 6 o'clock in the evening. We drifted until 12 that night; finally the boat stopped. On one side we could feel the ground but couldn't touch bottom on the other side. We had struck a sand bar. We couldn't see anything as we were about half a mile from the main part of the river. The captain came down with another boat and pulled our boat off the sand bar.

The combination bridge was started three different times. They first built the pier on the Iowa side; then it hung fire a year or more, then they organized another company and built two more piers and stopped for another year or two and finally got eastern money interested and organized again and voted a bond of \$380,000, and danged if it didn't carry. They had hacks, busses and carriages then. That gave employment to five hundred men in Sioux City. In another year it was built.

There was nothing but a few stores on Pear Street then; nothing on Pierce Street.

The railroad was built through Covington before the High Bridge, or railroad bridge, was built. They had to transfer from Sioux City to Covington by ferry boat, and I was captain of that transfer. When they built the railroad bridge that, of course, sent the pontoon bridge out of the river; they built the high bridge in 1888; I was on the ferry boat when they built it.

Captain Talbot had a right of way to build a street car track to Dakota City; the street car operated with gasoline.

The steamboat "Benton" was sunk about where they plan to build the Auditorium, in Sioux City. The "Benton" was headed down here from up the river; they left word at the bridge that they were coming through at 6 o'clock the next morning. They started through but hit the bridge and claimed they couldn't make it down the river, and she sank; was never

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raised; they had a law suit for damages and I was a witness; Capt. Simms, who lived at Chamberlain, was captain of the "Benton."